

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1833 06638 1960

GC
929.2
C542CR



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018

<https://archive.org/details/mynebraskachildh00clar>

My Nebraska Childhood

My Nebraska Childhood

By Rose B. Clark

All my life wiser people than I
have been saying: "Rosie, you ought to
do this. Rosie, you ought to do that."
Hence the name of my little booklet.

THE OUGHT-TO-BIOGRAPHY
OF AN OCTOGENARIAN

Nebraska Wesleyan Press

1963

Copyright, 1963
by Nebraska Wesleyan University

Cover design reproduced from an original water color by W. N. Wallis,
Pawnee City, Nebraska.

For

Leonard, Irene,
Jim, and Bill

Contents

INTRODUCTION

FOREWORD

FAMILY SKETCHES

Father
Clara

THE LITTLE GIRL

The Story Hour with Father
Learning to Read
The Preacher's Disappearance
A Crisis Passed
The Burial of a Governor
Elementary Studies
The High School Curriculum
Friday Afternoons
Disciplinary Measures

OUR TOWN

Townsfolk
The Military Band
Helping Hands
The Family Doctor
Welcome Home

INTRODUCTION

The story of the writing of this book is at least as important as the stories told and the impressions recorded in its pages.

In the first place, the author is past eighty, and that in itself is significant. How many books have remained unwritten by intending authors in their sixties, or even earlier, because "It's too late to start now"?

In the second place, this book was literally written with the wrong hand. Little Rosie Clark, as you will read, learned to write some eighty years ago with her right hand. Three years ago she learned to write again—this time with her *left*. Her "good" hand had been lying helplessly beside her on the bed for several years, in-

capable of holding a pencil. Have you read another book written by a right-handed octogenarian, with her left hand, while lying flat on her back?

I don't mean to make it sound like a stunt. It was no stunt. It was an irrepressible expression of a dauntless desire to keep on living. That is more important than any stunt.

Rose Clark retired from teaching geography at Nebraska Wesleyan in 1947. Her retirement was hastened by the perceptible advance of a form of Parkinson's disease, that insidious destroyer of muscular control that steals forward in tiny, but irreversible steps and defies the neurologist's skill. By 1952 the disease had advanced so far that housekeeping was beyond the ability of the formerly precise school teacher, and she went into residence in a nursing home, where she soon required the assistance of a nurse to perform the simplest acts of self care. She hasn't walked since 1956. She has practically forgotten her feet, except when they occasionally require medication.

There is one relenting aspect of Parkinson's. It leaves the mind and will intact. In the case of this stubborn Scottish woman, that was the strategic blunder that lost the victory for the destroyer. Rose Clark kept on thinking and living. She read armloads of books carried in by her friends. With the help of friends she kept up a correspondence with distant friends, relatives, former pupils and associates. She wrote actively things that were happening, mostly to others of course—current events, politics, jokes and stories. Most often her letters asked, "What's exciting that you're doing?" You don't have to run around to be alive, she taught us.

Then one day, a couple of years ago, she awoke to find herself helplessly confused, and her doctor quickly recognized that she had suffered a light stroke—not too surprising for one over eighty. They took her to the hospital in an ambulance, and called the relatives to come

to the bedside. But an amazing thing occurred. At first she had no desire to go on and live, but with the aid of those who did not give up and saw the possibility of rehabilitation, a spark of new life was ignited. Rose not only survived the attack; she counter-attacked! She began to show improvement, and soon it became apparent that she was actually stronger than before the stroke. After a few weeks she was ready to be moved—this time, to the Madonna Home.

Her doctor says that her amazingly improved condition might be due, in part at least, to the mild stroke. There's a lot we don't understand about Parkinson's disease. He also points out, however, that there has been administered a lot of loving care and understanding by the attendants at the home. They have an insight into the needs of the mind and personality as well as the body. They curl the hair and apply the lipstick and eyebrow pencil as happily as they bring the trays of food and soapy water. Under the guidance of trained therapists, they have coaxed the little lady's awkward hand to reach for the mirror.

To its own surprise, the left hand of Rose Clark began to respond to the challenge of the pencil, and the empty sheet of paper; and the laboriously written pages began to pile up. Presently, Rose Clark had written another book. She now says the ones she wrote thirty years ago were rather dull.

The interest, encouragement and editorial guidance of Ethel Booth, a friend and former colleague at Nebraska Wesleyan, also deserve mention. They made a substantial contribution to this book.

It is no exaggeration to say that the launching of the Nebraska Wesleyan Press, whose mark is on the cover, would not have occurred in 1962 had not this book refused to remain unwritten and unpublished.

With the last sheaf of manuscript pages handed to

me, Rose Clark included a quotation copied from a Coleridge poem:

When comforts are declining,
God grants the soul again
A season of clear shining
To cheer it after rain.

This book, from a season of clear shining, brings each reader both a message of cheer and an admonition.

James N. Ackerman

Lincoln, Nebraska
January 4, 1963

FOREWORD

I am an old, old lady, going on eighty-four. Four score of these years I have spent in Nebraska.

I was born on a farm in southern Ohio, the youngest of four children. My father, Andrew R. Clark, was born in a log house, which of course is no longer in existence. After the usual country-school training, he studied for a time in an academy set up by his pastor, a classical scholar from Washington and Jefferson College in Pennsylvania. The singing master from Cincinnati, who came at regular intervals to drill choruses and teach instrumental music, was responsible for his life-long fondness for music.

Father's further school education was interrupted by his voluntary enlistment in the Union Army. On returning from the service, he married Celia Arbuthnot, the preacher's daughter, and settled on a farm near his old home. We moved to Pawnee City, Nebraska, in 1882, probably because of Mother's health; she died in 1883 of quick consumption.

Although the family tradition favored higher education, I was the only one of our family to continue to a university degree. No doubt Grandfather Arbuthnot's library and his real sheep-skin diploma, which Mother brought with our other family goods, had an influence on all the children.

Almost all the students from Pawnee High School who entered the State University when I did worked for at least part of their expenses, for times were indeed severe. Fortunately, I fell into the hands of a kindly professor and his wife. Since they needed me especially as a baby-sitter—a term then unknown—I was well content to care for three-year-old Sylvia and do some household tasks on Saturdays. The atmosphere in that home was just what my parents had hoped for when they permitted their sixteen-year-old to set forth on the uphill journey to an education.

As a young girl, I received from a chapel speaker a bit of advice I never forgot. Speaking to the students who were crowded into a large classroom on the second floor of Old Main, he said: "Do you wish me to tell you my secret about the way to master studies? *Review each lesson seventeen times.*" Back in my pleasant room in the Professor's home, I tried to put that into practice. The reviews went faster and faster until I finally reduced them to five.

Competition was keen. Teachers were inspiring. Though deferred by an interval of teaching, graduation with scholastic honors came in 1904.

But to get on with my story—

Teaching experience culminated in twenty-five happy years at Nebraska Wesleyan University. "I hope to gather about me a group of people who wish to do an important piece of work," said the president on his first interview with me.

So I had a busy life as teacher, research worker, author of a few professional books on geography, but above all as a homemaker to my beloved father. My colleagues were keen, well-trained men and women. Wesleyan proved to be no "saints' rest," as some friends laughingly called it.

I sometimes thought of us as spirited horses handled by a superb driver. Yet there was freedom to follow one's own line of study; there was comradeship that lasted through the years, and encouragement to work for a higher degree. Any measure of success on a colleague's part brought mutual joy.

My former students gave me far more than I ever gave them. The best ones largely taught themselves. I tried to divide the factual and technical materials into teachable units and to explain them carefully. I asked the students to read in order to find needed data. Then I tested, retaught, tested again—until mastery was won on their level. With the facility they gained, they advanced more rapidly in the next unit. The goal must not be a passing grade; it must be mastery. "Talk this over among yourselves, until you talk yourself clear-headed; then write yourself clear-headed. I will try to return your papers with corrections."

In 1947 I was forced to resign because of ill health, later diagnosed as a form of Parkinson's Disease. A so-called "shut-in" for fifteen years, bedfast for seven of them—how on earth did I happen to write this little book?

Dr. E. Glenn Callen, a former colleague, whose judgment I greatly respected, suggested that I jot down some stories Father had told me of frontier days in Ohio, as well as of events in which I had some share in Neb-

raska. First I had to train myself to write with the wrong hand, since my right was partially paralyzed.

One day I happened to be telling the Sisters in the Madonna Home a bit of early mischief. "Why don't you write that story?" they said. Because of such suggestions and because of encouragement from other good friends, particularly James N. Ackerman, I have incriminated myself badly, without recourse to the Fifth Amendment. The events here narrated actually took place, and the characters mentioned really lived.

Miss Ethel Booth of the Wesleyan English Department aided and abetted me by rubbing out rough spots and giving unity and coherence to the booklet.

A firm belief in the eternal verities which my father taught and lived by throughout his long life has brought peace of mind. My cheerful room in the Madonna Home is never dull. The Sisters tell me human-interest stories, friends send clippings of current humor, and my relatives write amusing original letters while encouraging me to return to authorship.

It took a slight stroke, however, followed by hospitalization and physical therapy, to make me realize that *old age is no deterrent*. Think of the memories it has collected. If and when I reach ninety, I confidently expect to do a better job.

Rose B. Clark

Lincoln, Nebraska
August, 1962

FAMILY SKETCHES

Father

Clara

Father

“Our kind Heavenly Father”—so the morning prayer at family worship always began, as we knelt at chairs drawn back from the dining-room table.

The Father that we could not see must have looked just like the one that we could see. Of course, He must have had a beard, and brown eyes that twinkled when He smiled. His voice must have been low-pitched, except when it thundered. And surely He must have loved a joke.

In my childish mind I assumed that He could imitate the speech of human folks. “When the Norsemen came down from the North,” our father would quote a

very orotund speaker, using suitable gestures. Or, imitating the Swedish mill-wright who liked to visit of evenings under the apple trees, he would say of the neighbor's baby who was trying out his new pair of lungs, "I think dat kid goes a leetle to de extreme."

Father was a rascal about nick-names. A pretty ex-kindergarten teacher was the "lady who never grew up." A rather over-grown woman, far from handsome but extremely good-natured, was the "queen of hearts." A young lady who invariably arrived late as a guest was "set twenty minutes slow." The man who guarded the traffic at the Rock Island crossing was the "Old Man of the Sea." The juanty figure on the hard-coal stove was the "Plumed Knight" or the "Belted Earl."

Children loved Father at once. He would take a toddler in his arms and, counting its rosy toes, would recite—

This little pig went to market,
This little pig stayed at home.

Soon the living room would be filled with gay laughter. Another verse he quoted, which his own children never saw in print. Perhaps it was a bit of folk-lore recalled from childhood—

Peter McTrimety, he's a good fisherman
He catches hens and puts them in pens.
Some flew east, and some flew west,
Some flew over the cuckoo's nest.

Father was delightful company. He would put a caller at ease by asking friendly questions. Whether the guests were visiting preachers, returned missionaries, or teenagers, their interests were always his. This, with his extensive reading, kept him well informed.

Because he was not self-conscious, he was at ease with everyone. There was no distinction of race, color, or creed. As the porter on the Pullman brushed his coat, Father was learning how many children he had, how old they were, and what their plans were for the future. The two men parted "old friends."

During a happy summer spent at the University of Chicago, Father took long walks in the vicinity of the apartment. Returning one afternoon, he told of meeting a pleasant gentleman who invited us to call that evening. We found ourselves in a beautiful mansion, its walls adorned with works of art—the kind we could appreciate. There was another “old friend.”

A long summer spent at the Morningside Residence Club in New York City, to be near my publisher, brought varied experiences. In the park nearby, he met a Jew straight from the Ghetto, whose surprise gave way to pleasure as he told the white-haired man about his family and his work. On Sundays we went with a group of friends to the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian church, where that great layman, Robert E. Speer, gave deeply spiritual talks for four Sabbaths. After the last sermon, Father took my arm and led me—slightly protesting—to the front of the church to join others who were telling Mr. Speer goodbye. Father waited until the others had gone, then turned to thank the noted man. Mr. Speer caught his hand in both of his and said, “I’m so glad you spoke to me. Your face has been a radiant benediction to me every Sunday.”

“Your father looks just the way a father should look,” said a college girl. “Just my ideal of a Christian gentleman,” this from a thoughtful youth. “I saw your father’s face clear across the church,” said a Peru colleague, “and I felt he was a man who had suffered and conquered; he has the happy serenity of one at peace with God and man.”

Death was no stranger to Father, but he met his bereavements with unfaltering trust. He comforted us with words of hope from the Bible, his rule of life. After the death of our beloved step-mother, he brought to our Lincoln apartment the atmosphere of home, for that was a very part of him.

Father tried to prepare me for the separation he

knew must come. "It's nature," he said on his ninety-sixth birthday, "just as birth and growth are nature."

"What do you think the Better World will be like?" I asked one evening as we sat in our living room.

"I don't know, but I'm sure I am not worthy of it. I think it will mean a re-creation. I am not afraid."

On that last January evening before he quietly slipped away, his dear face brightened as he said clearly, "The longer I live, the more sure I am that God is my friend."

In the sunny Pawnee cemetery the loved pastor quoted the words of another hero: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

Clara

There is much I would like to tell about my winsome sister, Clara. The two years difference in our ages seemed very great indeed, for Clara could remember our mother and even some things about our former home in Ohio. One day she came home from school laughing merrily because, as she explained, the word *Ohio* was in the spelling lesson. Through all her life her merry laugh stayed with her.

Clara could do anything. With her nimble fingers, she could win every time at jack stones. Forwards and backwards, she could jump rope, and never once be tripped. She could run like a deer, and was always chos-

en first in running games. She could ride our pony, on our mother's side saddle, at a gallop around the block—her brown curls flying in the wind. And she could tell time. Once after a long session in front of the big family clock, she turned from me sadly and announced, "You're really dumb."

We were constant playmates. In summer we climbed to the top of the apple trees, where each had a nest in a favorite crotch. In winter, when the ice was solid, we ran to Turkey Creek, where she and the other children of her age skated until it was time to do the evening chores. Of course, we quarreled at times, but an hour's enforced separation made all right again.

Perhaps Father had told Clara that she must be a mother to her little sister. One day the responsibility was almost too much for endurance. The circus had come to town and had set up a big tent in a pasture not far from the schoolhouse. Before the housekeeper missed me, I had run down the alley and across the street to investigate the wonders before the show would begin.

A dark-haired man came from behind the tent flap and was stooped down to listen to all my serious questions. "Yes, we have an elephant, a big one that eats a ton of hay a day." "No, it doesn't have any tongue at all, but uses its long trunk for both a hand and a tongue." "Yes, we have two big awkward camels, like the ones shown in the Sunday-School book. They can drink ten gallons of water at a time."

Just as the nice man was starting to answer a question about lions, Clara ran up all out of breath, tears rolling down her cheeks. "Come home this minute, you bad girl. Why, they might steal you the way they used to steal slaves. I'll tell Father on you, and you know what you'll get."

Clara grew up to be an even lovelier young lady than her childhood had promised. Her educational interest was in secretarial training; and after completing the

course, she secured a good position in Lincoln, where she and I shared an apartment for the last two years of my University life.

Wherever she was, there was fun. She had her piano installed in a corner of our large living room and resumed piano lessons. Our apartment soon was a center for the young folks of the neighborhood church, chiefly because of her charm as a hostess. We established life-long friendships.

In the office where Clara worked, love found her—a steadfast love worthy of the two young people, a quiet trustful love that never altered. She and Will were married in our pleasant parlor at home. Then the guests were invited to go to the doctor's large home south of us for the wedding supper. "We want to do that much for Clara and Will, as part of the family," our friends explained. We had already carried the food from our house to their kitchen.

The young couple settled in a lovely home next to Will's parents, who adopted Clara as their own. In the course of two years, the arrival of a son, Leonard, made all our happiness complete.

Imagine our despair when Clara's doctor found that she was a victim of tuberculosis, the family enemy which had taken our mother. They tried everything known to science in those days—shots of tuberculin; a trip to Colorado, which brought only home-sickness; then a return to their sunny home, where Clara and Will evidently decided to accept without bitterness whatever would come.

To leave her little son seemed unthinkable. But she remembered our own mother, and how bravely she had left us. She remembered Father's courage—and her whole expression changed. Her face was illumined.

Between spells of coughing, she comforted us. "It won't be long until we'll all be together again." And so, on a sunny April day, her little son's fifth birthday, she left us for "our kind Heavenly Father's house."

THE LITTLE GIRL

The Story Hour with Father
Learning to Read
The Preacher's Disappearance
A Crisis Passed
The Burial of a Governor
Elementary Studies
The High School Curriculum
Friday Afternoons
Disciplinary Measures

The Story Hour with Father

The Little Girl felt very close to her father. For guidance, for understanding, and for consolation, she turned to him after her mother's early death. Their companionship was to last a long, long time.

Now, as she looks back across the years, she realizes that of all her memories, the most cherished is of the evening story hour. During the long months when housekeepers were trying more or less successfully to be homekeepers, she looked forward to the hour when her father, coming home late from the store, would take her and Clara upon his knee for a very special story. From those stories, her active imagination created an image of what

he was as an Ohio farm boy, as a young soldier in the Union Army, and as a member of a family with a staunch religious faith.

Almost word for word, she remembers his account of his home in Ohio:

When my father was twelve years old, he drove an ox team all the way from the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia to a hilly countryside near the Ohio River. His family believed that treeless land could not produce crops; and since they were tanners as well as farmers, they chose a place where there was abundant spring water, and trees to provide tanning bark.

You want to know how they tanned hides, don't you? Well, they dug a deep pit, put in a layer of oak and chestnut bark, then a layer of hides, and so on until the pit was nearly full—allowing room for bucket after bucket of spring water to help extract the tannin.

And you always want me to tell you about the house where I was born. It was built of logs we had stripped of bark. There were three rooms downstairs, and two attic rooms above, where we children slept. You know there were eight of us. The nicest thing about the old house was the fireplace where Mother and the girls did the cooking. We didn't have stoves then like our kitchen range, or like the hard-coal stove that we put up in winter.

But now it's time for little tads to be in bed. So run upstairs, and when you are ready, I'll come up and hear your prayers.

Many of the stories were concerned with the Civil War days and with life in the Union Army. The little girls never tired of hearing about the experience he had shortly after he volunteered to join the Union Forces:

After my enlistment I waited impatiently to be mustered in. One morning I rode my horse down to the little village two miles away.

Old Mammy Jane, a highly respected freed-woman, ran out to say, "Marse Andy, you better git right

home, for Morgan's Raiders are a'shoutin and a'yell-in jest around that hill yonder. If'n they ketch an enlisted young feller like you—

I didn't wait for her to finish her warning, but turned my horse and galloped all the way home. Mother was out in the yard feeding her chickens. I shouted to her what Mammy Jane had said, then led all the horses out of the stable, and hid them in the thicket well beyond the tanning pit. I returned on foot to learn that Father, who had been away all morning on church business, had doubted the warning and had ridden on to bring the horses back to the stable.

Just then, in came a whole troop of Morgan's Raiders, with bowie knives and pistols, giving the Rebel yell. One of them caught the bridle of Father's horse and ordered him to dismount. By that time Mother had helped me to hide in the stump bin, a hollow stump tightly covered for storing grain.

The hungry Raiders, looking in the door, saw a baking of bread on the pine table, partly covered with a white cloth. Off they rode with Father's horse and Mother's bread. As they left, one of them—a mere boy—called out, "We'll be back tomorrow for the rest of the horses."

Soon after daybreak the next morning, there came the sound of martial music, then the tramp of marching feet. Suddenly a neighbor woman, a staunch Presbyterian, who always said she couldn't understand why the Methodists shouted, yelled "Glory, Hallelujah—Praise be," for she had caught a glimpse of blue-coated men armed and ready to drive the Raiders back to their Kentucky home.

The Little Girl still remembers a very different story that her father told. She remembers how rainy the evening was and how good it seemed to be in a nice comfortable house:

I was about nine years old when this happened. You may not know what I mean when I say that a plague of Yellow Fever broke out in the community. That is a dreadful disease often found in hot countries. We don't know yet how it spreads, but maybe some

folks from South America came up the Mississippi and the Ohio River and spread the plague in Cincinnati. From there it swept into our community.

I was playing with my dog when I noticed Father and Mother talking very seriously. "I don't like to be away from you and the children," Mother said, "but she's a good neighbor, and asks me to help her. Her husband is too scared of the disease to be much good."

"It's right for you to go," said Father. "The older girls and I can manage with the cooking."

When Mother returned about noon the next day, she said that the husband had died that night, but the wife had lingered until morning. None of our family took the disease.

The Little Girl remembers how soft and reverent her father's voice was as he added, "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." Her father was so brave and good that surely no evil could come to them.

Learning to Read

The motherless Little Girl was a problem to her father. In a few days her six-year-old sister would start the fall term in the advanced section of the First Grade. There would be no one at home to look after the little four-year-old, except such housekeepers as might be available. No housekeeper lasted very long; all complained about having "that restless child" on their hands all day.

In his predicament, her father appealed to the First Grade teacher, Miss Olds. "Yes," she said, "you can send the little girl to school with her sister. I'll take care of her as long as she behaves herself." So the big-hearted

teacher added another wiggler to her group of sixty children, and started another learner on the royal road to reading.

Whatever method Miss Olds used, it was a good one. In a very short time the Little Girl was reading rapidly. Her printing left much to be desired, and she was slow in numbers; but *she could read*. As yet she had not learned the little couplet, but she would have agreed fully with the substance of its lines:

There is no frigate like a book, to bear us lands away,
Nor any courser like a verse of prancing poetry.

Then began the search for "something to read," which has lasted for a lifetime. Her Sunday-School teacher gave her the first child's book she ever saw—with simple black and white pictures to fit the little stories.

In the spare room at home she searched hungrily in the tall home-made bookcase for something interesting in her grandfather's theological books. There was Booth's *Reign of Grace*, which had an illustrative story or two. There was a six-volume set of *History of the Puritans*, which with judicious skipping provided some entertainment for a Sunday afternoon; Father was very particular about Sabbath-day reading.

The climax came when she discovered that the new preacher had a whole set of the works of Charles Dickens. When she finished the household tasks required of her, she would race upstairs to crawl under the bed and lie on her stomach while she lost herself in the adventures of *Oliver Twist* or *David Copperfield*. A part of her summer chores was to alternate with her sister in driving the cow to a pasture north of town. As she trudged along, bare-footed, with a stick in her hand, she lived over those matchless tales of Sam Weller or Little Nell.

When she entered high school at the age of twelve, she found a treasure trove. A scholarly old minister, on his retirement, had turned over to the public school his

entire library. The books were piled on the deep window sills in the assembly room. There were complete sets of Shakespeare, Thackeray, Scott, Dickens, Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Cooper, James Russell Lowell, and most of the earlier American poets. It was easy to pick up a book, retire to one's seat, and follow the career of Ichabod Crane and the headless horseman. Today, as an old lady, the Little Girl pays this tribute to a saint, long since gone to Heaven, who never knew what a wide world he opened to her and to many others.

Some time later, after a university degree and two years of teaching, she visited relatives in Ohio. They had saved most of the letters her parents had sent back home when they first came to Nebraska. In one of these her mother, whom she could not remember, had described the beautiful broad prairies and black soil and had added, "I have greatly enjoyed reading two books a neighbor loaned me—*Adam Bede* by the late George Eliot, and *Great Expectations* by the late Charles Dickens.

The Preacher's Disappearance

As she sat beside her father and her pleasant new step-mother, the Little Girl was not aware of the hardness of the pews in the old frame church in the north part of town. The room was indifferently heated by a tall stove in the corner, not far from the pulpit. Even the janitor, as he tip-toed noisily forward to throw in the great chunks of wood, did not detract from the solemnity of the occasion.

The Little Girl stood with the other members of the congregation for the long opening prayer, but she wiggled in an unchurchlike fashion before the loud *Amen* came as a signal for everyone to be seated. She

knew just what would happen when the tall minister, a Scot by accent, would announce the psalm to be sung. Since there was no musical instrument—the creed forbade such an innovation—and no choir, a clear-voiced woman would stand in front and raise the tune. The congregation would join more or less successfully in the familiar air; they must mean just what they sing, she thought, for they are so solemn about it.

That morning the sermon was as long as ever, and every phrase ended in the familiar “uh.” Father was frowning at her restlessness, and no relief was in sight. Then, suddenly, just as the sermon reached its “fourthly,” there was a loud crash and the parson disappeared. The floor boards under long strain finally had given way.

From her small height the Little Girl could not see whether men rushed to the parson’s aid or whether he was able to pull himself up to firm flooring. What she remembers best is the quiet poise with which he raised his steady hand to pronounce the familiar benediction—“May the love of God . . . be with you always.”

The next day men started to raise a subscription of \$6,000 to build a new brick church. Today the successor of that stately building is used as a medical clinic and a meeting place for the Chamber of Commerce.

A Crisis Passed

It was a beautiful day in May, but the Little Girl in the Second Grade was not happy. That morning, when she had read in turn the story in *McGuffey's Reader* about Meddlesome Mattie, she had been terribly conscious of the fact that the homefolks often applied that name very pointedly to her. Just last evening her father, who was usually so very kind, had switched her legs for dumping all her colored doll-clothes into the pan of clear starch that the washerwoman was saving for the pillow shams and the white petticoats.

And it was the third day since the teacher had announced her desperate plan. Worried beyond endur-

ance by her restless brood, and fearful of the criticism that might come from the superintendent—she had determined to call the roll before dismissing school. Those who had been quiet and orderly were to answer “Perfect”; those who had whispered or been noisy must answer “Imperfect.” Any child who answered “Imperfect” for three days in succession would be kept after school and whipped.

All day the Little Girl on the front seat was deeply troubled. She mustn’t tell a lie; the Commandment said not to. In her guilt-conscious mind, she realized that the teacher knew that she had been naughty every day. When the roll would be called, she would have to answer “Imperfect.”

The Little Girl and a stout-looking older boy were all that remained in their seats. The other children, shocked by the disaster to their classmates, were tip-toe silent as they marched out past the weary teacher.

Picking up a limber stick from her desk, Miss B. gave the boy several licks on his legs. He left, fighting back the tears he would not shed. “I don’t like to whip a little girl,” she said, to her everlasting credit, “but I must punish you.” With that remark she took a wooden ruler from her desk and tapped smartly the outstretched right hand. The Little Girl would not cry; she had been taught at home to choke back her tears. Without a word she went to her desk, took out her reader, speller, slate, and pencil—and ran down the alley to her own kitchen.

A carpenter, at work repairing the screen door, said, “What’s the matter, little girl?” “I’ve quit school, and I’m never going back—never, never, never!”

She does not remember what her father said, but he did not punish her; and the next morning she was in the front seat as usual. Evidently, Miss B. had decided on a change of tactics, for there were no more roll calls at dismissal time and the spring term ended happily.

The Burial of a Governor

The Little Girl in the Fourth Grade knew that something unusual was going to happen; but what it was, was not quite clear.

Last evening after a church bell had tolled solemnly, with long pauses between the strokes, her father had called the children in from their play and had told them to stay quietly indoors. He explained that the entire town was in mourning.

Today, on her way to school, she had noticed that everyone looked sad. One man had a black band on his sleeve, and several women were red-eyed. After

school was called, she stood with her class to read in turn, from *McGuffey's Reader*:

How sleep the brave, who sink to rest
With all their country's wishes blest.

Then followed the spelling lesson, with the teacher pronouncing each of the ten words slowly and distinctly. Pencils squeaked as the children wrote on their freshly washed slates. The Little Girl tried hard not to glance at the slate of her seat-mate, who wasn't a very good spell-er but was best in the class in reciting the multiplication tables.

Instead of starting the lesson in penmanship, as they would usually have done, the children put away their books, slates, and pencils, and marched quietly into the hall. The little girls donned their sunbonnets, and the boys their floppy straw hats. Guided by the teacher, they moved in double lines to the road leading to the cemetery on the hill west of town—each child carrying a little bouquet of ribbon grass and blue flags provided by the ladies of the W.R.C. (Woman's Relief Corps)

Their arrival near the entrance to the cemetery had been timed to correspond to that of a black carriage with tall dark plumes. The Little Girl knew what that was, for it had stopped in front of her house some time ago and had taken her mother away. Men of the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic), some on foot others in carriages, followed the hearse. After them the long rows of school children fell into line, with a teacher leading each grade. At the rear came the high-school pupils and the school superintendent. (Children in those days were not sheltered from the sterner phases of life as they often are today.)

In square-toed shoes, the Little Girl scuffed along the dusty road. The sun shone hot, but the trees cast a grateful shade. She remembers still that wild roses bloomed profusely on either side.

Within the cemetery the company halted by an open

grave. The tall minister seemed unusually solemn as he said, "We now commit to earth the body of David Butler, the first governor of the Commonwealth of Nebraska." The cedar coffin was slowly lowered into the grave, and the clods of earth fell upon it with heavy thuds.

The Little Girl placed her wilted flowers upon a soldier's grave nearby, not realizing in the least the historic meaning of the occasion. What was a governor, anyhow? Was he the man her folks had talked about last evening? The man from Lincoln? He must have been someone great, like the Superintendent of Schools.

Escaping from the line of march, she ran past her mother's grave, through the prairie grass into the unused section of the cemetery. There she stopped long enough to fill her mouth and her bonnet with wild strawberries before skipping home to supper.

Elementary Studies

By the time the Little Girl had reached the Fifth Grade she was using a pen and pencil instead of a slate. The pen was a complicated utensil for her unskilled fingers. She had to push the steel point into the holder, dip it into the hinge-topped inkwell, and then strive to imitate the beautiful slant of the letters on the top line of her *Spencerian Copy Book*. Painstakingly she wrote, each line a little worse than the one above it, such instructive sentences as—

Honesty is the best policy.

Order is Heaven's first law.

Time and tide wait for no man.

Her seat-mate could write those proverbs with letters slanted as evenly as a field of wheat blown by the wind.

"Numbers" had become "arithmetic." Fortunately, there was a well-worn *Ray's Third Part Arithmetic* at home, one which the older children had used. All too soon she found herself in the meshes of fractions, interest (simple and compound), square and cube root, and—horror of horrors—partial payments. It is still painful for her to recall the way that book pursued her clear through the Grammar Grades. A Ph.D. in mathematics would have to scratch his scholarly head to get the answers in the back of the book to some of those problems in partial payments. (No, no—he would use an electronic computer.)

The Little Girl and her classmates found fewer disappointments in *Reed and Kellogg's Grammar*. After learning the parts of speech, they discovered how to arrange the words diagrammatically to show their places in the sentence. By parsing nouns and pronouns, conjugating verbs, and comparing modifiers, they became well prepared to grasp the deeper complexities of Latin in High School.

Hutchinson's Physiology and Hygiene demanded its share of attention. With the help of a human skeleton loaned by a doctor, the children learned the names of the bones; traced the circulation of the blood so that they could glibly recite a *Gulliver's Travels* of that fluid through auricles, ventricles, arteries, veins, and capillaries; and yet remained ignorant of the sad fate of Servetus, the discoverer of the circulation.

Footnotes in fine print gave suggestions as to health practices, but they meant little to that class. A colored diagram showed the horrible effects of alcohol on the liver; but the town's three or four periodic drinkers, reeling down the street, taught that lesson more effectively.

Then there was *McMaster's History of the United States*. It is a pity that elementary texts are so condensed

when children need a wealth of details to stimulate their imagination and to arouse their interest. Perhaps a textbook writer should learn from the town's best gossip and pour out his story at full length. McMaster did a splendid job of condensation, but he presented too little and too late. His text was organized about wars and presidential administrations, ending with McKinley.

There was an excellent appendix containing the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and the Proclamation of Emancipation. The pupils learned to admire the Founding Fathers, to have high regard for military leaders, and to enthuse over presidents belonging to their fathers' political party. That constituted their training in civics.

The *Elementary Geography* was the least successful of all the textbooks to the Little Girl. It used difficult words that had deep unexplained meanings—*revolution*, *rotation*, *degrees of a circle*, *tropics*, and *equator*. The class never saw a globe, and could not have read maps if they had possessed them. To most of the children, geography became a hated subject.

For the inadequacies in the other books, however, *McGuffey's Readers* made compensation. When William McGuffey in 1857 published, and then in 1879 revised, the first edition of his *Readers*, he brought to children some of the best literature the world has ever known: prose and poetry, fact and fancy, tragedy and comedy, life and death, Shakespeare and Lucy Larcom, the Bible and Barney Buntline. The poetry rippled with rhythm; the prose sparkled with interest. The Little Girl held her breath in awe as William Tell shot the arrow right into the apple. After reading of Hamlet's ghost, she longed to learn how the story turned out.

Educators and parents in the eighties may have over-emphasized the thought of death. Infant mortality was high, and consumption sometimes took entire fam-

ilies. Parents were more concerned about the character and manners of their children than about their happiness. It took later generations to insist on a good time now rather than in eternity.

Johnny could read then—with no movies, no radio, no T.V. to distract. There were many families of real culture in the small town, and reading was the favorite pastime in their scanty leisure.

Today, in the room of the Little Girl of long ago, the cleaning woman happened to see a set of *McGuffey's Readers*. Her face became illumined when she discovered "Forty Years Ago" in the *Fifth Reader*. "Such a nice poem," she said. "Just think of getting to go through high school and college." The opportunity to go through high school and college is indeed something to think about and to be grateful for. Perhaps the elementary schools of the eighties and the nineties—better than they knew—were laying the foundations for that wonderful experience.

The High-School Curriculum

When she entered High School, the Little Girl may have thought that she was bigger and wiser than she actually was. She was only twelve years old. In the early nineties school officials were not particularly concerned about children whose academic progress had exceeded their social development,

The high-school curriculum was exclusively college-preparatory. It offered three years of Latin, algebra, plane and solid geometry, general history, physiology, botany, zoology, physics, and chemistry. There was also a deservedly unpopular course called "rhetoric." Oral and written compositions were almost unknown. It was

like learning the rules of language without getting to play the game.

In spite of the poorly equipped laboratories, the teaching seems to have been remarkably effective. To cite an illustration—one year in the mid-nineties, Pawnee County sent thirty students to the University. Four years later, five of them returned “trailing clouds” of Phi Beta Kappa glory. The Little Girl was one.

Friday Afternoons

Even in the First Grade, the Little Girl was required to "speak a piece" in the regular Friday program. As a frightened toddler, she attempted to recite, "The day was calm and cool," but could only gulp out, "Teacher, how do you pronounce c-a-l-m?" Without waiting for an answer, she ran to her seat in tears. In the Second Grade, she could repeat clear through to the end,

Twenty froggies went to school
Down beside a rushy pool.

A brisk-looking girl in the Fourth Grade recited cheerfully: '

Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is but an empty dream,
For the soul is dead that slumbers—

Here the pent-up giggles were too much for her, and she returned to her seat with the applause of all her classmates. A bright classmate in the Fifth Grade announced, with appropriate gestures, to her captive audience,

Curfew shall not ring tonight.

Such power hath Time to teach the young ideas that an ambitious boy in the Eighth Grade urged,

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones.

In his Junior year in High School, a very reluctant boy, nerved by the threat of a “licking” if he didn’t, stood before the assembly room, one shoulder higher than the other, to recite a poem of his own selection:

A wonderful stream is the River of Time
As it flows through the Valley of Years.

Disciplinary Measures

Since there was no rule against corporal punishment, a teacher might slap a culprit, use a ruler on his hands, or seize him by the back of the collar and shake him until his bicuspid rattled.

If the case warranted sterner measures, the superintendent took the boy to the basement and warmed his short trousers with a rubber hose—a weapon that left no bruises, but produced thumps that might be heard with salutary effect by the classmates in the room above. Not even high-school boys were exempt from good “lickings.” As for girls, the principal’s stern “You may remain after school from half past three to four

for three weeks" was a grim reminder of Eternity.

The misdemeanors frequently called for strenuous measures. In at least two instances, the Little Girl—grown into a teenager—was the guilty one. Was it too much adrenalin in her glands? Was it original sin that persisted in spite of her sober upbringing as a United Presbyterian? Was it an inferiority complex because she was the homely member in an otherwise good-looking family? Or was it merely that her social development lagged behind her academic progress?

Once she uncorked a bottle of H_2SO_3 which she had sneaked into the assembly room from the chemistry laboratory. The vile odor which rushed from the bottle produced a reaction mild as compared to that created by the other misdemeanor. The whole school knew that the principal was head over heels in love with a pretty young widow named Kate. When he asked each pupil to respond to roll call with a quotation from Shakespeare, the chance was too good to miss. "Dear Kate, sweet Kate, pretty Kate," the Little Girl recited from *The Taming of the Shrew*. A very red-faced young man fairly shouted the usual sentence, "Remain after school."

It took stout-hearted boys to dare the worst offenses. Sneaking into the building at night, they used to climb to the tower on the Mansard roof and emerge triumphantly with the big school bell. If the janitor happened to be a good detective, the culprits might be surprised next morning to hear the familiar clangor. At least, they were almost never caught. What respected citizens those rascals are today!

OUR TOWN

Townfolk

The Military Band

Helping Hands

The Family Doctor

Welcome Home

Townsfolk

I wish that I could write a fitting tribute to my hometown—Pawnee City, Nebraska. I have fond memories of its gently rolling hills, its historic and geologic features, its pleasant homes and shaded streets, its beautiful churches, and its well-ordered schools.

Above all—my heart turns in grateful love to the people. As pioneers, they were earnest, hard-working folk, representing many cultures. In origin they were Scotch, English, Welsh, Scandinavian, German, and Czeck; but they had one common purpose—to rear their children to be God-fearing citizens and to give them the best possible education.

Although the use of alcoholic liquor was prevalent elsewhere, they allowed no saloons within the town limits. Through hard times and good times, they supported their churches and schools. They showed their concern for the future by urging their children always to excel.

One of the merchants, when he was approached by an ambitious student about a loan for the continuation of his professional study, replied promptly: "I'm just signing a note for myself; I'll add the amount you need." The student kept faith, and both prospered.

Another merchant inadvertently taught several of us how to save. Since he took many small notes in trading, he offered to sell us some of the best ones bringing eight per cent. This gave him the ready cash and gave us a start in accumulating a principal long before the day of income taxes.

The town may have been puritanical. Yet from such beginnings came stout-hearted men and women—preachers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, dentists, teachers, nurses, military leaders, journalists, legislators, farmers, and home-makers. Probably the quota was greater than from the average small town. We shall never forget our Oxford scholar and our United States senator.

The Military Band

The whole town was proud of them. They could not only play the most spirited music, but they could also march like trained soldiers—four abreast, led by their tall handsome bandmaster, whose young daughter played the French horn. The board walks on both sides of Main Street were not wide enough to hold the crowds.

Nearly every family in town boasted of some relative who played the horn or beat the drums or tooted the piccolo. Many of the leading merchants, both of the bankers, the three lawyers, the town photographer, the druggists, and quite a sprinkling of high-school boys made up the full membership of about fifty.

Parents were glad to have their sons enrolled. "When Bill is at band practice, we know he is in good hands," they said. Or, "When the band has an out-of-town engagement, we know the older men will look after the youngsters." Nobody spoke of juvenile delinquency in those days, for most of the natural leaders belonged to the band, and were too busy to get into mischief.

In addition to giving the weekly concerts, the band generously played for all public celebrations—for Decoration Day, when they led the parade to the cemetery; for High-School Commencement, when they sat in the front seats in the old Opera House and gave at least two stirring numbers.

The most popular event, however, was on the Fourth of July—when there were patriotic speeches, band selections, and a picnic dinner in the park. Occasionally the boys varied their program by singing. How the crowd cheered when the deep basses and high tenors of the older men blended with the fresh youthful tones of the boys!

When Mother heard the drum beat from down town, she would lift the heavy iron kettle to the back of the stove to prevent the pot roast from being scorched. Turning the damper in the stove pipe to keep the fire burning low, she would take off her apron, don her small hat and cape, call Clara and me, and hurry down to Main Street to mingle with the cheering crowd.

As the band came down the dusty street, every head was high, every man in step, and every instrument making a joyful noise. Dogs barked, people clapped, and a Baltimore oriole in the elm tree in front of the hotel trilled and twittered.

Those were the days of drought, depression, and crop failure; but the people kept their courage strong. A great-hearted, civic-minded doctor inspired the town to vote taxes to help pay for instruments, and for band leadership. The results were a music-minded community, a demand for better song service in the schools and churches, and the sparkling high-school band of today.

Helping Hands

In pioneer Nebraska, neighborliness was at its festive best when work was to be done and when all hands "pitched in" to do it. For the women there were quilting bees, sewing bees, canning bees, and gatherings of any other variety that need or circumstance might suggest. The men exchanged labor in house-raisings, huskings, and threshings. Whatever the occasion might be, it called for plenty of food and lively story-telling. A "spinner of yarns" was seldom lacking.

We children knew that fun was in store when we returned from school some afternoon to find four or five bushels of juicy red apples on the kitchen floor. That

meant a paring bee. Father would go across the alley to invite the Methodist preacher and his family to come over in the evening with their paring knives and aprons. Schedules must have been more flexible than they are now, for the low-ceiled kitchen was sure to be filled to capacity. In the soft glow from the kerosene lamp on the walnut dresser, the older folks would station themselves on Windsor chairs; the children would choose footstools best suited to their size and station.

The minister must have felt more relaxed than he would have felt with members of his own denomination. Perhaps it was the gingham apron tied around his waist that dispelled his usual dignity. Perhaps it was his clever manipulation of his pocket knife as he cut the great circular parings from the apples that brought to his mind the experiences he had had in other times and places. His little six-year-old Johnny let uneven parings fall from his stubby fingers to the floor as he listened—except when all activity was halted by riotous laughter. Later Mother brought glasses of cider and a big plate of molasses cookies.

With all the apples pared and ready to be made into apple butter, the party ended. Before going home, the minister always stood, reverently removed his apron, and offered a prayer for the two families whose lines had fallen together in such pleasant places.

The Family Doctor

Hospitals in early Nebraska were far between. Trained nurses were almost unknown. No one had even heard of pediatrics, to say nothing about geriatrics. And the niceties of surgery were as yet non-existent. In times of illness family doctors needed to be resourceful, and neighbors needed to be kind.

Our doctor lived in the house just south of ours. We loved his college-bred wife and his three curly-haired little children. The tie between the two families became very strong.

We never forgot the trying day when he said that Father must have an operation. Operation! the very word

was terrifying. Mother put all the extra leaves in the dining room table, just as he asked her to do and provided plenty of clean sheets and newspapers.

When the doctor arrived the next morning with a fellow physician to act as anaesthetist. Father stretched out on the table, ready for whatever fate awaited him. His voice was that of a good soldier, clear and unshaken; but we children hurried to the kitchen to choke back our tears. In the absence of a nurse, Mother stood ready to prepare anything that the doctors might call for.

The operation was successful. The doctor gave, not only his best in professional skill, but also a son's love for a friend that he had learned to call "Father."

The doctor's children were always welcome at our home—at mealtime, or even to spend the night. Everyone knew that his home might overflow at almost any time with guests or patients. More than once the guest was a tiny baby that needed more care than it could have at home. To the doctor's wife the forlorn little mite was hers—to bathe, to feed, to rub with olive oil, and to love as her own. In two or three weeks the baby would be ready to return, plump and rosy, to its rested mother.

Sometimes the case was different. Once a lovable boy dashed in from school to tell the doctor about his stomach ache. "It's real bad," he said, but he wouldn't cry. The doctor put him to bed at once, but a ruptured appendix had already done its fatal work. In those days there were no antibiotics.

Day in and day out, the doctor's family exemplified the second commandment—Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Welcome Home

Of all the virtues emphasized by the Pawnee City Schools, none was made more impressive than patriotism. It is no wonder that boys subjected to such an influence should be among the first to respond to their country's call after the sinking of the *Maine*.

Months passed, months of anxious pilgrimages to the village post-office. No one seemed to fear the final outcome of the war, but there was much concern over the safety of individual boys. Finally the war was over.

One sharp-eyed little boy remembers to this day the details of the celebration when two veterans, former band members, who had enlisted as musicians from the Uni-

versity, arrived in full uniform at the Burlington station. To him it seemed that the whole town turned out to meet them.

From the station the heroes rode with the mayor in an open carriage drawn by a team of matched horses. Other distinguished citizens followed in less spectacular carriages. Then came the G.A.R., the band, and the inevitable company of small boys and barking dogs.

Through the cheering crowds, the procession moved in time to the music to its destination south of the Courthouse Square, where a barbecue pit steamed and where all was ready for the feast. The night before, the butcher had built a log fire; and when the fuel had been reduced to embers, the beef had been placed over the coals on grates. The baker had donated the buns; and other merchants had furnished the coffee, the sugar and cream, and whatever else was necessary for the occasion. All the stores were closed for the day.

So, with eating and drinking, with speeches and music, the town welcomed home its heroes. And over all, the stars and stripes floated at their patriotic best.

